
FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

Submitted by: Biomass Working Group, Tahoe Fire Commission

Finding: Woody biomass processing is an essential component of restoring healthy forest conditions, reducing the severity and intensity of future wildfires, lowering air & water pollution, and has the potential for managing greenhouse gas reduction in the Tahoe Basin.

Background and Supporting Evidence: We have seen the devastation a wildfire can bring to the Tahoe Basin and do not wish to allow this to happen again and are promoting the utilization of the forest woody biomass rather than allowing it to burn in the open by uncontrolled wildfire.

There are currently no biomass-to-energy processing facilities in the Tahoe Basin due to several issues, including 1) access to materials, 2) cost of acquiring woody biomass, and 3) consistent, adequate supply of biomass materials for processing. Forest treatment and air quality permitting and enforcement protocols can create uncertainty, delay, and expense to discourage biomass operations.

To make in-Basin biomass processing a near term reality there must be significant public and private investment. Further, to successfully implement in or near Basin biomass harvesting as part of any forest treatment there must be certainty of long-term supply, economical access to that supply, equipment set-up at or near materials locations and if necessary, supplementary funding to offset unrecoverable costs.

For several years, all Tahoe region agencies priorities have included fire danger reduction through restoring healthy forest conditions with the removal of the unnatural accumulation of fuels. With the new Multi-Jurisdictional Hazardous Fuels Reduction Strategy 10 year plan to reduce hazardous forest fuels it is expected that significantly more biomass will be generated. This will require large amounts of removal and disposal, or utilization. Because this material currently has very little commercial value and the cost per acre can be higher in sensitive environments (i.e. stream environmental zones [SEZ's] due to limitations on the use of mechanized equipment and limits on the use of prescribed burning to meet both ecological and fuel reduction objectives, most agencies and landowners are faced with the expense of 1) disposal by burning, 2) potential disposal to a landfill (although not practice in the basin), 3) chipping and

spreading, or 4) transporting it to green energy facilities for conversion to renewable energy, an option that facilitates utilization, not disposal. Once the initial treatment has occurred on the forest, then prescribed burning is also a preferred option on the landscape. Therefore, the accommodation within TRPA's environmental thresholds must be accomplished.

Currently woody biomass is being transported out of the basin. Last summer the Placer County biomass box program transported 615 tons to a green energy facility 50 miles away (this is in addition to the standard green waste removal via county contractor in the Tahoe Basin). This effort provided renewable energy, climate change benefits and lowered pollution levels. The Nevada Fire Safe Council sponsors chipping and spreading even more tonnage each year.

Recommendation(s)

We advocate that the following be recommended to the Governors of the states of California and Nevada:

- 1) Provide financial and operational support to projects and programs that maximize efforts that promote biomass conversion to green energy as practical within and near the Tahoe Basin. This financial support could come from a combination of Production Tax Credits (similar to solar and wind), Feed-In Tariffs, future Carbon Credits and focused state grants and agency funding where feasible.
- 2) Where feasible and subject to an economic and ecological analysis demonstrating that processing facility investment in or near the biomass materials source is superior to hauling biomass materials to an existing processing facility, provide funding to accelerate viable coordinated stand-alone biomass to energy facility (or capability) at each end of the Tahoe Basin (due to economics and logistical issues of road use and forest access) to make the disposal of annual forest material a preferred option. Funding should be complementary to any private funding to develop a public/private partnership and could come from focused state grants and agency funding where feasible.
- 3) Direct regulatory agencies within the Tahoe Basin to establish consistency in the application of emissions thresholds for permitting process of facilities.
- 4) Direct state agencies and encourage all agencies to streamline access to biomass materials', including ensuring access through and within SEZ's and use of temporary roading.

- 5) Direct state agencies and encourage all agencies to facilitate the use of state lands for biomass harvesting activities, and advocate the availability of federal lands for this purpose.
- 6) Advise the use of existing federal and state contracting tools to enter into long term (minimum 10-year) agreements for the supply of biomass materials to qualified utilization organizations. If necessary, the contracts would contain financial incentives to pay unrecoverable costs.
- 7) Allow the most cost effective and ecologically sound treatments on the landscape. The purpose of this recommendation is to reduce the cost per acre of treatment of the forested lands and cost per bone dry ton of the biomass to allow for a more economic basis to ensure utilization rather than disposal of biomass.
- 8) By gubernatorial and congressional action establish a goal that will maximize biomass potential for forest treatment under all annual planning mechanisms. The goal should provide assurance that a long-term supply (minimum 10 years) is available to attract private investment in biomass facilities. A higher goal, if possible, is preferred in order to minimize the air quality and other negative impacts of pile burning.
- 9) Request that both Governors advocate removing legislative barriers to utilization of woody biomass from public lands and both Governors advocate federal tax credit parity for all forms of renewable energy under the Federal Energy Policy Act

Impacts of Implementation:

Analysis of impacts on the following factors is REQUIRED (Best Estimate):

- ☐ Cost – standard per acre biomass treatment cost from past studies and information from prospective biomass operators.
- ☐ Funding source – new component of eligibility under existing revenue sources to subsidize deficit, but largest part of funding is expected to result from revenues from biomass utilization.
- ☐ Staffing – private sector applicants, current agency staffs.
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws – modify to allow access, establish in-Basin operating sites. If necessary, obtain legislative authority to ensure that the current process provide timely access.